U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

FY 2006 Alpena FRO Accomplishment Summary

Cooperation with Native Americans

Conserving this Nation's fish and other aquatic resources cannot be successful without the partnership of Tribes; they manage or influence some of the most important aquatic habitats both on and off reservations. In addition, the Federal government and the Service have distinct and unique obligations toward Tribes based on trust responsibility, treaty provisions, and statutory mandates. The Fisheries Program plays an important role in providing help and support to Tribes as they exercise their sovereignty in the management of their fish and wildlife resources on more than 55 million acres of Federal Indian trust land and in treaty reserved areas. The Alpena Fishery Resources Office in Alpena, Michigan actively cooperates with Michigan Tribes regarding conservation of Great Lakes fisheries. The accomplishments listed below reflect some of the activities the Alpena FRO conducted in cooperation with Native Americans in Fiscal Year 2006 (October 2005-September 2006).

Coded Wire Tag Extraction

Submitted by Adam Kowalski
Fish and Wildlife Biologist

During the month of October 2005, Fishery Biologist Adam Kowalski extracted and read coded-wire-tags (CWT) from lake trout. CWTs are microscopic metal tags placed in the snouts of juvenile lake trout at the hatchery. Lake trout heads were collected during the spring fishery independent lake whitefish survey conducted by the Alpena FRO. Kowalski also extracted and read CWT from lake trout sampled by the Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority (CORA).

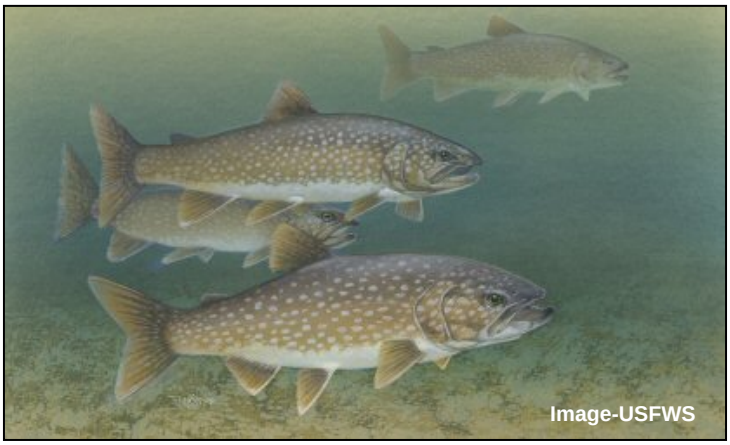
CWTs are extracted by cutting lake trout snouts into smaller and smaller pieces until the tag can be seen and removed. CWTs are read under a microscope, and each tag's unique number is recorded. The tag number, when compared to stocking records, yields information such as stocking location, stocking date, fish age, fish strain, and hatchery of origin.

In total, Kowalski removed and read over 100 tags from approximately 125 heads. Not all adipose clipped lake trout contain CWTs, because some lake trout shed their tag and some are erroneously fin clipped. Additional lake trout heads will be received from Bay Mills Indian

Community (BMIC), the Michigan DNR creel program, and the Alpena FRO fall surveys. These heads will be processed when received.

Data collected from lake trout CWTs are used to determine harvest limits, stocking locations, movement patterns, and post stocking survival rates of various hatchery practices. These outcomes are consistent with the Service's goal of building and maintaining self-sustaining populations of native fish species while providing recreational fishing opportunities and meeting the needs of tribal communities under the "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management" priority of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Service and State Update Lake Trout Stock Assessment Models in 1836 Treaty Waters of Lake Huron



Submitted by Aaron Woldt
Fishery Biologist

Fishery Biologist Aaron Woldt of the Alpena FRO and Ji He of the Michigan DNR updated lake trout statistical-catch-at-age (SCAA) models for 1836 Treaty waters of Lake Huron. Each year the Modeling Subcommittee (MSC) of the Technical Fisheries Committee (TFC) is charged by the Year 2000 Consent Decree with updating stock assessment models for lake trout and lake whitefish in 1836 Treaty waters and producing safe harvest limits. The Year 2000 Consent Decree is a 20 year fishery allocation agreement for 1836 Treaty waters signed by the State of Michigan, United States, Bay Mills Indian Community, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, and Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians.

There are two lake trout SCAA models for 1836 Treaty waters in Lake Huron. The MH-1 (north-western Lake Huron) model includes statistical district MH-1 in US waters and management area 4-1 in adjacent Canadian waters. The MH-2 (north-central Lake Huron) model includes statistical district MH-2 in US waters and management areas 4-2, 4-3, and 4-7 in adjacent Canadian waters.

Woldt, along with He, added 2005 commercial harvest, recreational harvest, biological survey, and stocking data to the Lake Huron models. Woldt and He began analyzing model output, performing diagnostic tests of the models' performance, and produced preliminary 2006 harvest estimates for the state-licensed recreational fishery and the tribal commercial fishery. Woldt and He will present these preliminary model results and harvest limits at the March 14-16, 2006 meeting of the MSC. Woldt and He will perform additional model diagnostics on the Lake Huron lake trout models, make changes where necessary, and further refine the preliminary harvest limits prior to presenting these limits to the TFC on March 31, 2006.

Model results from these analyses will determine 2006 lake trout harvest limits for both the state-licensed recreational fishery and the tribal commercial fishery in 1836 Treaty waters of Lake Huron. The harvest limits produced will allow fisheries to be executed while still protecting the biological integrity of the lake trout stocks. This outcome is consistent with the Service's goal of building and maintaining self-sustaining populations of native fish species while meeting the needs of tribal communities under the "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management", "Cooperation with Native Americans", and "Partnerships and Accountability" priorities of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Service Biologist Chairs Modeling Subcommittee Meeting for 1836 Treaty Waters

Submitted by Aaron Woldt
Fishery Biologist

Fishery Biologist Aaron Woldt of the Alpena FRO attended and chaired the March 14-16, 2006 meeting of the Modeling Subcommittee (MSC) of the Technical Fisheries Committee (TFC). The primary focus of this meeting was to generate preliminary 2006 harvest limits for lake trout in 1836 Treaty waters of lakes Huron, Superior, and Michigan, although other technical matters were discussed. As stipulated in the 2000 Consent Decree, preliminary lake trout harvest numbers must be calculated by the MSC, reviewed by the TFC, and presented to the parties to the decree by March 31 each year. The MSC will complete final lake trout harvest numbers and present them to the TFC for review at the May 3 TFC meeting.

Biologist Woldt and Ji He of the Michigan DNR presented an update of the status of northern Lake Huron (MH-1 and MH-2) lake trout stock assessment models, model diagnostic output, and preliminary 2006 lake trout harvest limits. In MH-1, the 2006 preliminary lake trout harvest limit increased from 2005 levels due to continued lower than target total mortality rates and increases in stock and fishable biomass. In MH-2, preliminary harvest limits dropped from 2005 levels due to a change in the way survey selectivity was modeled in 2006. This change results in a better model fit to the observed index of abundance from the graded mesh lake trout survey and more accurate model estimates of abundance. The 2006 preliminary harvest limit for MH-2 is still well above recent harvest levels for this unit. These preliminary limits were presented to the TFC for review on March 31.

In addition to performing model analyses, biologist Woldt helped run the MSC meeting ensuring all agenda items were discussed and kept meeting minutes. A preliminary draft of the March 14-16 MSC meeting minutes was emailed to MSC members for review.

Harvest limits produced at this meeting, when reviewed by the parties and finalized, will become binding 2006 lake trout harvest limits for 1836 Treaty waters. These harvest limits will allow lake trout fisheries to be executed while still protecting the biological integrity of the lake trout stocks. This outcome is consistent with the Service's goal of building and maintaining self-sustaining populations of native fish species while meeting the needs of tribal communities under the "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management" and "Cooperation with Native Americans" priorities of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Gill Net Maintenance

Submitted by Scott Koproski
Fishery Biologist

During the month of March 2006, Fishery Biologists Scott Koproski and Adam Kowalski completed repair of assessment gill nets used during the 2005 fishery independent lake whitefish survey in 1836 Treaty waters. Two different styles of gill nets were fished by Alpena FRO during this survey: traditional bottom style gill nets and experimental gill nets that fish higher in the water column. The difference between the two styles of nets is that the traditional gill nets have the weights secured to the bottom part of the net frame and the experimental gill nets have the weights secured to a three foot dropper line which is secured to the bottom part of the net frame. This dropper line results in a "mesh free" area located at the bottom 3 feet of the water column. The experimental nets help reduce lake trout by-catch during the survey since lake trout typically orient themselves on the lake bottom. Koproski and Kowalski repaired in excess of 14,600 feet of gill net this past winter.

Both standard and experimental gill nets were fish simultaneously during the 2005 fishery independent lake whitefish survey. Preliminary results indicate that lake whitefish catch rates (CPE) increased slightly using the experimental assessment nets and lake trout CPE dropped significantly. Both types of assessment nets will be fished during the 2006 survey and results will again be analyzed.

This work is an example of Alpena FRO's commitment to the following Fisheries Program Vision for the Future priorities: "Partnerships and Accountability", "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management", and "Cooperation with Native Americans".

Service Biologist Chairs Modeling Subcommittee Meeting for 1836 Treaty Waters

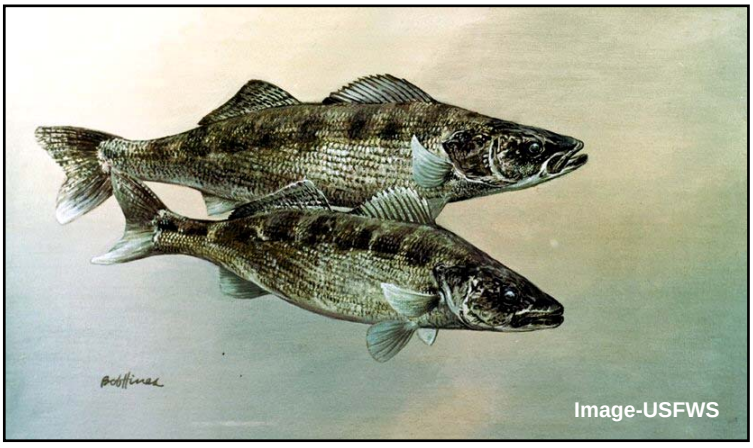
Submitted by Aaron Woldt
Fishery Biologist

Fishery Biologist Aaron Woldt of the Alpena FRO attended and chaired the September 19-21, 2006 meeting of the Modeling Subcommittee (MSC) of the Technical Fisheries Committee (TFC). The primary focus of this meeting was to generate preliminary 2007 harvest limits for lake whitefish management units in 1836 Treaty waters of lakes Huron, Superior, and Michigan, although other technical matters were discussed. As stipulated in the 2000 Consent Decree, preliminary lake whitefish harvest limits must be calculated by the MSC, reviewed by the TFC, and presented to the parties to the decree by November 1 each year.

In addition to performing lake whitefish model analyses, biologist Woldt ran the MSC meeting ensuring all agenda items were discussed and kept meeting minutes. A preliminary draft of the September 19-21 MSC meeting minutes was mailed to MSC members for review. Preliminary lake whitefish harvest limits will be presented to the TFC for review on October 27. The MSC will complete final lake whitefish harvest limits and present them to the TFC at its December meeting.

Harvest limits produced at this meeting, when reviewed by the parties and approved, will become binding 2006 lake whitefish harvest limits for 1836 Treaty waters. These harvest limits will allow lake whitefish fisheries to be executed while still protecting the biological integrity of the lake whitefish stocks. This outcome is consistent with the Service's goal of building and maintaining self-sustaining populations of native fish species while meeting the needs of tribal communities under the "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management" and "Cooperation with Native Americans" priorities of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Alpena FRO Assists Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority with Walleye Assessments in 1836 Treaty Waters



Submitted by Scott Koproski
Fishery Biologist

During the week of September 18, 2006, Fishery Biologist Scott Koproski traveled to Sault Ste. Marie, MI to assist the Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority (CORA) with their annual juvenile walleye assessment of the St. Marys River. Using the Alpena FRO electrofishing vessel, Koproski and 2 CORA staff sampled 3 locations in the St Marys River system (Waiska Bay, Lake George, Sugar Island Side Channel) over 3 nights. The objective of this work is to determine the contribution of hatchery reared walleye to the St. Marys River walleye population and to index juvenile walleye abundance. Hatchery stocked walleye are immersed in oxytetracycline (OTC) prior to release. OTC leaves a mark on calcified structures like otoliths and vertebrae that can be detected in the lab. Data collected will also be used to determine appropriate stocking levels and stocking locations for this system. Staff from the Alpena FRO has been assisting CORA with this walleye assessment for the past 13 years.

Assessment of walleye in the St. Marys River is another example of the Alpena FRO's commitment to the following Fisheries Program Vision for the Future priorities: "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management" and "Cooperation with Native Americans". Walleye are both a recreationally and commercially important species in 1836 Treaty waters. The Alpena FRO will continue to evaluate stocking success by CORA in the future which will benefit the resource and all harvesting parties.

The **Alpena Fishery Resources Office (FRO)** is located in Alpena, Michigan and works to meet U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fishery and Ecosystem goals within Lake Huron, Western Lake Erie, and connecting waters of the St. Marys River, St. Clair River, and Detroit River. Activities include Aquatic Species Conservation and Management, Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management, Cooperation with Native Americans, Leadership in Science and Technology, Partnerships and Accountability, Public Use, and Workforce Management – all of which are conducted in alignment with the Service Fisheries Program Vision for the Future. The station is one of many field offices located within Region 3, the Great Lakes Big Rivers Region. For more information about Alpena FRO programs and activities visit our web site located at http://www.fws.gov/midwest/alpena/.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alpena FRO, 145 Water St., Federal Blg. Rm. 203, Alpena, MI 49707